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***RIINVEST COLLEGE
HOTEL AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT
LEVEL 5***

ACCREDITATION

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

26 Apr 2021, Zagreb, Croatia



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

Date of site visit: 30 April 2021

Expert Team (ET) members:

- *Dr. Dražen Vrhovski*

Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

- *Naim Gashi, KAA Director*
- *Shkelzen Gerxhaliu, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring*
- *Arianit Krasniqi, Senior Officer for Accreditation and Evaluation*
- *Ilijane Ademaj Ahmeti, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring*
- *Leona Kovaci, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring*

Sources of information for the Report:

- [1] *Self-Evaluation Report, Riinvest College, Level 5 in Hotel and Hospitality Management, date/location of publishing unknown*
- [2] *CVs of the study programme academic staff*
- *Video material illustrating RIINVEST teaching, research and other relevant infrastructure:*
 - [3] *Video entitled “Data Science and Business Analytics”, date/location of publishing unknown*
 - [4] *Video entitled “Design”, date/location of publishing unknown*
 - [5] *Video entitled “Hotel and Hospitality Management”, date/location of publishing unknown*



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- [6] *Video entitled “Public Administration”, date/location of publishing unknown*
- [7] *Video entitled “Riinvest College Facilities for Student With Disabilities”, date/location of publishing unknown*
- [8] *Document entitled “Staff Survey 2020”, date/location of publishing unknown*
- [9] *Document entitled “Stakeholder Survey 2020”, date/location of publishing unknown*
- [10] *Document entitled “Student Survey 2020”, date/location of publishing unknown*
- [11] *Document entitled “Riinvest College Alumni responses”, date/location of publishing unknown*
- [12] *Document entitled “Riinvest College Stakeholder responses”, date/location of publishing unknown*
- [13] *Document entitled “Staff data 2020” providing tabular data of unspecified nature, date/location of publishing unknown*
- [14] *Document entitled “Student data 2020” providing tabular data of unspecified nature, date/location of publishing unknown*
- [15] *Document entitled “Student data 2020 Teaching” providing tabular data of unspecified nature, date/location of publishing unknown*
- [16] *Evaluation Report for 2017-2018 Academic Year (in Albanian), Riinvest Quality Office, Prishtina, 2018*
- [17] *Riinvest Code of Ethics and Conduct, Riinvest College, Prishtina 2019*
- [18] *Example document showing a completed Administrative Staff questionnaire, date of publishing unknown*
- [19] *Example document showing an improvement plan, date/place of publishing unknown*
- [20] *Example document showing a completed peer review form, date of publishing unknown*
- [21] *Meeting Minutes, Quality Assurance Committee meeting held 4 Dec 2020, Prishtina, 2020*
- [22] *Regulation on Quality Assurance, revised version, Riinvest College, Prishtina, 2019*
- [23] *Regulation on Bachelor Studies, Riinvest College, Prishtina, 2017*
- [24] *Document entitled “Riinvest College Staff Development Plan Example”, date/location of publishing unknown*
- [25] *Statute of Riinvest College JSC, Prishtina, 2017*
- [26] *Riinvest College Strategic Plan 2020-2023, date/place of publishing unknown*

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- [27] *Example document showing vacancy notice, Riinvest College, 2020*
- [28] *The history of Riinvest brand over the years, [online], available at: <https://www.riinvest.net/>, [Accessed 21 Apr 2021]*
- [29] *Departments and Programs, [online], available at: <https://www.riinvest.net/en/departments-and-degree-programs/>, [Accessed 21 Apr 2021]*
- [30] *National Development Strategy 2016-2021, Government of the Republic of Kosovo, Prishtina, 2016, [online], available at: <http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/>, [Accessed 21 Apr 2021]*
- [31] *Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021, Government of the Republic of Kosovo, Prishtina, 2016, [online], available at: <https://masht.rks-gov.net/>, [Accessed 21 Apr 2021]*
- [32] *USAID/Kosovo Country Development Cooperation Strategy 2020-2025, USAID, 2020*
- [33] *Strategy for Kosovo, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), 2016.*

Sources referenced from [1] and [2] were provided by the Riinvest College prior to the online evaluation interviews, whereas the sources from [3] to [27] inclusive were requested and received upon the interviewing.

In addition to the above documents, the institution has supplied two additional sets of supplementary documents covering thesis/final work writing-up procedures and general study regulation documents. Given that the documents supplied refer to BSc and MSc study levels, the latter has been disregarded from further assessment, whereas the BSc level documents are seen as providing a valid foundation to base the corresponding Level 5 documentation on once the study programme evaluated will have been approved by the KAA.

Criteria used for program evaluation:

- *Standards and performance indicators outlined in the Kosovo Accreditation Agency's Accreditation Manual, 2018.*
- *The European Qualifications Framework*
- *The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*

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- *National Qualifications Framework, Kosovo National Qualification Authority, Prishtina, 2020.*

1.2. Site visit schedule

- 09.00-09.40 Meeting with the management of the faculty where the programme is integrated*
- 09.45-10.30 Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff*
- 10.30-11.15 Lunch break*
- 11.15-12.15 Meeting with the heads of the study programme Hotel and Hospitality Management, Level 5*
- 12.20-13.00 Meeting with the teaching staff*
- 13.05-13.45 Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders*
- 13.50-14.00 Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts*
- 14.00-14.10 Closing meeting with the management of the faculty and program*

1.3. A brief overview of the institution and program under evaluation

The Riinvest College (hereafter referred to as: the Riinvest) was established in 2007 as a follow up to the Riinvest Institute founded in 1995. According to [25], the Riinvest has been headquartered in Prishtina and its legal form is a joint stock company (JSC). The institution has been owned by 15 individuals each holding not more than 42% of shares. Two of the shareholders own roughly more than 80% of the shares and one of them acts as the Chairman of the Shareholder Assembly authorised to legally represent the Institution.

According to [29], the Riinvest runs two (2) study programs – “Economics” and “Computer Sciences” – taught on both BSc and MSc level. However, no data on the number of students



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enrolled is available both online as well as in the documentation accompanying the evaluation process.

The Professional Education Hotel and Hospitality Management program which has been the subject of the undertaken evaluation (hereafter referred to as: Study Programme) is a new study programme targeting high school graduates interested in starting their professional career in tourism. The programme somewhat deviates from the existing Riinvest portfolio as there is no corresponding BSc level program of the similar nature which would serve as a follow-up step to graduated Level 5 students. The Study Programme is a two-year programme carrying 120 ECTS credits and corresponds with Level 5 of the Kosovo National Qualifications Framework.

Work done in the course of the undertaken evaluation has been based on the self-evaluation report [1] prepared by the Riinvest College (hereafter referred to as: SER), as well as on supplementary information and documentation listed in Section 1.1. All the documentation was provided either by the Institution/KAA or has been publicly available via different channels.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the assessment process did not include site visits to Riinvest locations. The evaluation has therefore been done entirely via online interviews and by means of document consultation. Although this has not had any influence on the objectiveness of the assessments made, nevertheless the process has still been somewhat hindered by the inability to undertake physical inspection of the Riinvest facilities and operational procedures.

As given in Section 1.2, online meetings were held with the following stakeholder groups and attendees:

- *Riinvest Management, attended by Mr Alban Zogaj, Mr Arben Damoni, Mr Armend Muja, Ms Dorina Kralani and Ms Diana Lekaj;*
- *Quality assurance and representatives of the administrative staff, attended by Mr Adnan Maxhuni, Ms Elirjeta Beka, Ms Diandra Nela, Ms Njomza Havolli, Ms Rita Sekiraqa, Mr Hazir Gashi and Ms Allmedina Hoxha;*
- *Academic staff members acting as the heads of the study programme, attended by Ms Diana Lekaj and Mr Uragan Alija;*
- *Teachers, attended by Mr Hazir Gashi, Mr Etnike Dibrani, Ms Argjenta Plakolli, Mr Dardan Cahani, Mr Bujan Stavileci and Ms Andrra Berisha;*

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- *Representatives from the industry, attended by Mr Fatih Baycan.*



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2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

2.1. Mission, objectives and administration

The Riinvest College mission may be found in [25] and online at [28]. The mission of the Study Programme is given in the SER and formulated as to provide “...trained employees for the hospitality industry and to create a positive, learning-centred environment that encourages lifelong learning in our community”. In doing so, the Study Programme focuses on the four key areas: hotel management, tourism and travel management, catering and culinary arts, and Spa and wellness management.

Both mission statements are rather generic and as such fit for a variety of possible academic and/or business outcomes. In this regard, it may be said that the mission of the Study Programme has been aligned with the overall mission of the institution. Nevertheless, instead of making an omni-applicable formulation, it would rather be expected that a study programme mission would identify key immediate and future challenges of the given economy sector and translate them into a coherent strategic orientation. However, this has not been the case and the mission does not imply programme’s comparative advantages and unique discriminators on the market, neither it suggests programme’s strategic orientation with respect to the geographic area of interest, research focus or target academic relevance.

Furthermore, the Riinvest prides itself to have been educating young professionals and even experts to the “...benefit of Kosovo’s development needs...” [25], nevertheless, if relevant national strategic documents such as [30] or [31] are searched for occurrences of the word “tourism”, not a single hit can be found. Almost the same hit record stands for other documents focusing on Kosovo strategic development and generated by alternative eligible sources such as [32] and [33]. It may therefore be argued that although the mission of the institution and that of the study programme correspond to each other, the former may hardly be seen as providing a balanced reflection of the current and future specific strategic needs of both the institution and the local community, neither it recognises in a meaningful way any of the critical trends of the 21st century’s industry/economy. In addition, it may also be found somewhat pretensions given that it suggests a global reach of the college.

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As indicated earlier in Section 1.3, the Riinvest does not offer hotel and hospitality management programmes on BSc or MSc levels. As such, prospective graduated students of the Study Programme may – if they choose so – continue their “specialisation” in hospitality management either by taking one of the generic management programmes taught at Riinvest or seek studying opportunities elsewhere. Given that former option (“specialisation by generalisation”) represents an oxymoron, it is unclear what was the academic/business logic behind setting up the Study Programme with respect to the possible further specialisation options.

In addition to the questionable rationale driving the formation of the Study Programme, no evidence has been either presented or gained proving that a relevant academic and/or professional advice had been sought for when designing the Study Programme. Thus, for instance, the interviewed management representatives and the heads of the Study Programme referred to the University of Dubrovnik, Croatia as a benchmarking university. However, no concrete evidence which would demonstrate outputs of such benchmarking has been presented. Furthermore, the interviewed representative of the employers clearly stated that he had not been consulted on the Study Programme content even though it has repeatedly been claimed in the undertaken interviews that the programme has been generated in accordance with recommendations from the business sector. Indeed, it may be argued that such recommendations have been collected elsewhere, nevertheless, given the undisputable career of the interviewed employers representative, it would somewhat be expected that his advice would be sought for.

Evidence has been provided demonstrating formal policies, guidelines and regulations addressing various academic and/or procedural issues have been generated and put into power. However, only a limited number of these is publicly accessible. Thus, for instance, from the college website, under “Regulations”, it can be seen that only a handful of important documentation is downloadable for general public. Even if some of the documents are treated confidential for mere business reasons, or available elsewhere on the website, it is not clear why regulations like those covering academic mobility, cooperation with the industry, research and other such issues have not been made publicly available at the same URL.

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Although there has been a regulation introduced to address ethical (mis)conduct [17], it must be said that the content of the document serves more to stipulate typical statutory rules of conduct rather than ethical misbehaviour. In this regard, ethical misconduct has only been referred to in the document in relation to nepotism and accepting gifts, whereas issues such as plagiarism, harassment of any kind, gender or any other inequality, and other such issues all seem to have been left unaddressed.

Finally, the institution has failed to demonstrate a clear vision on its strategic orientation and goals related to the Study Programme, and both the documentation supplied, and the feedback gained leave room for arbitrary interpretations. Through the undertaken evaluation a number of contradictory information and feedbacks have been received such as, for instance, a feedback from the management that the formation of the Study Programme has been an official objective of the current strategic development plan [26], even though not a single reference to such an objective can be found in the corresponding document.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Define an update to (or generate a new) the strategic development plan taking into account all relevant influencing factors some of which have been commented above. Identify hospitality industry as a key/strategic niche and assess business opportunities in the target geographic area. Outline clearly key strategic academic, research and business objectives of both the institution and the Study Programme, clearly indicating concrete action items, risks and exact/measurable performance indicators.*

2.2. Quality management

Evaluation actions and improvement planning have been integrated into the regular planning processes, and Riinvest staff take part in these activities. However, it remains unclear to what extent is the thus collected feedback translated into concrete improvements as there was evidence that either feedbacks collected, or the corresponding improvement plans get eventually neglected. Thus, for instance, even though examples of the feedback collected have

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been provided in Albanian only [13], [14], [15], if translated quickly by an online translating facility, it may be seen that there were a number of feedbacks commenting issues such as bad internet connection, not adhering to the scheduled consultations timing, too much focus on theory instead of practical applications and other such feedbacks. Nevertheless, it could not be seen that these feedbacks have been taken into account and that the corresponding action plans and improvements have taken place since the comments were made.

Feedbacks are collected from students, graduates and employers, however, no evidence has been presented proving the results are made publicly available. Also, in the example survey form aimed at collecting employer feedbacks [10] it is evident that a great deal of the content is focused on the Riinvest image rather than on concrete value it provides to the economy. Thus, for instance, questions such as “What is your impression about RIINVEST in general”, “What is your impression about RIINVEST in general” or “How likely are you to recommend RIINVEST as cooperation partner” are highly unlikely to benefit the quality of the learning outcomes achieved. Furthermore, it is interesting that, to prove peer reviews are being taken care of, the Riinvest has submitted an example report dating as late as in 2017 [20]. Interestingly, the report (in Albanian) is done in a manual handwriting form which makes follow up analysis and actions much more time consuming and hence ineffective.

The quality improvement process is regulated primarily by the Regulation on Quality Assurance (QA) [22]. The regulation was adopted in 2018 and revised in 2019. Even though the regulation seems sound and addresses all relevant QA issues, it relates the frequency of the study programme evaluations to the guidelines provided by the Kosovo Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. In addition, the QA evaluation tools are more focused on inputs and processes rather than outputs, and no evidence has been collected proving that outputs of the study programmes currently provided by the Riinvest, such as the progression rate, graduation rate, achievement of learning outcomes and others, are systematically analysed.

Finally, even though QA arrangements and measures are relatively well organised, to improve the quality further, it is recommended the Riinvest seeks examples and advice from other comparable higher education institutions outside Kosovo such that to develop a fully functional system able to meet the strategic objectives and minimise the immanent administrative burden.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

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ET recommendations:

- 1. If it hasn't already done so, introduce a system which would collect and keep record of the undertaken peer reviews in a digital format thus allowing for easier manipulation and analysis.*
- 2. Introduce measurable KPIs which would be included in and analysed during the semestral or annual reporting process.*
- 3. Revise the stakeholder survey questions such that to reflect more on the possible academic/research benefits rather than on Riinvest public image.*

2.3. Academic staff

The Riinvest has provided a tabular overview of academic staff to be engaged in the Study Programme. According to [1], there are 19 academics in total expected to take a part in the Study Programme, three (4) of which are designated part-time. However, if the data found in the SER are compared with the enclosed CVs [2], some of the part-time statuses may be challenged as further shown in Table 1 in Section 2.4.

In addition to the corresponding national laws and regulations of the Republic of Kosovo, the hiring and appointment conditions are governed by the Riinvest statute [25] as well as by the Code of Ethics and Conduct [17]. Prior to employment, teaching staff is introduced to all expectations and conditions of employment. In supporting this, the Riinvest has supplied a sample vacancy notice document [27]. Moreover, the interviewed teachers have confirmed they had been duly informed on what is expected from them upon employment such as to generate at least two (2) scientific papers per annum and other such expectations. It remains however unknown whether these expectations translate into contractual conditions or not.

According to the SER, eight (8) full-time academics engaged in the Study Programme hold a PhD or DBA degree. In this regard, the Riinvest meets the requirement of having employed at least one full-time staff member holding a PhD degree for every 60 ECTS credits in the Study Programme. No evidence has been provided as to whether the academics expected to be involved in the Study Programme hold more than two concurrent teaching positions or not.

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Different opportunities are provided for additional professional development of teaching staff. In supporting this, the Riinvest has provided an example of a staff development plan document [24]. However, the given document provides a mere list of trainings planned to be held in 2020/21 academic and hence cannot be deemed as a personalised development plan aimed at mitigating insufficient capacities of an individual teacher.

In addition to lecturing, responsibilities of teaching staff include other engagements in the academic community and the feedback collected has demonstrated teacher's interest and enthusiasm in undertaking such activities.

Finally, even though the SER suggests that the standard requiring to change the employment status upon retirement automatically to part-time is not applicable to the given evaluation process, it is left unclear why such regulation has not been put into effect. The Riinvest Statute [25] in Article 25.4 does say that all employments are made "...in accordance with the Labor Law in Kosovo and other by-laws applicable in the field of employment", nevertheless it remains unclear whether these laws address the given requirement or not. For instance, the national Law on Higher Education, in Article 28 states that the provisions related to staff retirement are governed by the statute of the institution.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. In case it hasn't been done so already, update the existing regulatory documents such as the Statute and regulations governing the staff appointment policies and procedures such that to address the change in employment status upon retirement.*
- 2. Make the results of the undertaking evaluations publicly available taking into account privacy issues that may hence arise.*
- 3. Introduce policies aimed at further personalised professional development of teaching staff.*
- 4. Sort out inconsistencies related to the status (FT vs. PT) of the academics expected to take part in the Study Programme.*

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2.4. Educational process content

As argued in Section 2.1, even though the Study Programme claims to have been aligned with the needs of the local labour market, there are no evidence which would underpin such statements. Quite contrary! As can be seen from the draft financial plan provided in the SER, there is a continuous and substantial decline in the expected number of students enrolled which directly contradicts the alleged high interest of the labour market.

In the SER, the key learning outcomes of the Study Programme are stated to be, among others, to:

- “analyse trends and organizational data and develop business strategies for the hotel and hospitality industry”,
- “collect and evaluate information to make sound decisions in hotel and hospitality management”,
- “demonstrate leadership, teamwork, and interpersonal skills needed for managing diverse and global hospitality operation”,
- and others.

Even though all of these are legitimate studying outcomes, still they are rather seen as overstatements especially given that in the mission section it is said that "...the program is designed to provide trained personnel for entry-level positions and mid-management positions...". It is therefore hard to expect from a junior, or even a mid-management staff member to be required to “develop business strategies”, let alone from a graduate Level 5 student.

Furthermore, the Study Programme does not follow a logical didactic flow and only a marginal progression in target competences may be seen as many of the programme modules typically describe its content as aimed at providing introductory or basic-level knowledges and skills. The Study Programme may hence be deemed as a mere collection of modules giving an overview of typical hospitality industry processes. However, even if such an approach may indeed be seen as appropriate to a level 5 study programme, still, there is a number of

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contradictions and deficiencies in the proposed curriculum. Thus, for instance, it remains unclear how come that none of the modules proposed studies hotel or resort logistics, let alone green/sustainable operation of hotels and resorts critical to successful operation of modern touristic complexes. Such a viewpoint has also been confirmed by the interview employer representative too.

Further to what has been discussed in, if the CVs of the teaching staff [2] are assessed carefully, it is not clear what was the hiring/teaming-up principle when designing the Study Programme given that only four (4) of them (namely, Ms Andrra Berisha, Mr Dardan Cahani, Ms Saxhide Mustafa and Bujan Stavileci) have accumulated some concrete yet marginal experience in the hospitality industry. Equally so, if the information from the staff CVs is summarised as in the table below, it may be also seen that only a handful of teachers has got a formal degree in hotel and hospitality management, and it is entirely unclear how come that the professionals educated and specialised in the fields of architecture are found most eligible for the given Study Programme. Moreover, it is unclear how come that, for instance, Ms Etnike Dibrani, a 27 year old with a BSc degree in Geography has been found most capacitated to teach a compulsory “Travel and Tourism” module, neither it is clear what formal education and/or professional specialisation/development has she undergone to be deemed capacitated for a lead lecturer/module holder position. In addition, some of the teachers are question-marked for their employment status given that they have been qualified as full-time employees in [1] which somewhat contradicts the info found in [2].

Incidentally, according to SER, there are 19 academics participating in the Study Programme. However, the institution provided as many as 20 CVs. If the two are compared, it turns out that Ms Argjenta Plakolli is not expected to take part in the Study Programme.

All courses are taught in Albanian and include syllabi clearly describing course objectives, learning outcomes and the teaching methods expected to be used. The feedbacks collected from the teaching staff and the programme heads suggests the staff is well qualified and capacitated to teach in English. It therefore remains unclear how come that the Riinvest qualifies the corresponding standard (Standard 4.5) as “not applicable” to the given Study Programme [1].



Table 1: Summary of teaching staff competences and professional background

	Name	Current position	Organisation	Experience in Hospitality Industry				Field of education	Note	Status
				No	Junior	Mid	Exec			
1	Alban Hasani	Executive Director	RIINVEST	✓				Economics		FT
2	Alban Zogaj	Lecturer	RIINVEST	✓				Economics		FT
3	Andrra Berisha	Front Office Manager	RIINVEST		✓			Hospitality	Current position held since Sep 2020	FT
4	Arbnora Gojani Mazreku	Executive Associate	UNDP	✓				Politics		PT
5	Argjenta Plakolli	Lecturer	RIINVEST	✓				Economics		FT
6	Arnisa Kryeziu	Consultant	Studio ARTING	✓				Architecture		FT (?)
7	Bujan Stavileci	Sales and Marketing Mngr	Sheraton		✓			Hospitality	Current position held since 2020	FT (?)
8	Bujan Pira	University Professor	UASF	✓				Mech Eng		PT
9	Dardan Cahani	Executive Sous Chef	Sheraton			✓		Hospitality		FT (?)
10	Dhimitri Bibolli	Director	New Age School	✓				Linguistics		PT
11	Diana Lekaj	Lecturer	RIINVEST	✓				Economics		FT
12	Diellza Gashi Tresi	Lecturer	RIINVEST	✓				Economics		FT
13	Durim Hoxha	Lecturer	RIINVEST	✓				Economics		FT
14	Etnike Dibrani	Lecturer	RIINVEST	✓				Geography		FT
15	Freskim Sylejmani	Architect	archiEDU	✓				Architecture		FT
16	Hazir Gashi	Lecturer	RIINVEST	✓				Economics		FT
17	Majlinda Bilalli	Director	KERASAN	✓				Civil Engineering		FT
18	Rinor Kastrati	Managing Partner	Growth Lab	✓				Economics		FT (?)
19	Saxhide Mustafa	Owner	Rime Group				✓	Law		FT (?)
20	Uragan Alija	CEO	Marigona Hill	✓				Economics		FT (?)

This is particularly puzzling given that English fluency is rather critical in any kind of tourism undertaking.

The feedback collected from both the interviewed teachers and students/graduates suggests appropriate student-teacher relationship and full student appreciation of the efforts made by the teachers. In addition to written or oral exams, most of the programme modules include valuing teamwork and class activities of a student and the balance between these assessment options seems appropriate. Nevertheless, there are certain discrepancies in the assessment methods used. Thus, for instance, both Business Economics I and II module use written exams as the only assessment method which is found completely inappropriate, especially given that there are much better ways to assess the accumulated practical knowledge through, for instance, project tasks or other such methods.

Finally, further to the rather pretentious study programme learning outcomes discussed earlier, some of the module learning outcomes are also found overestimated or rather unclear, especially for a level 5 study programme. Thus, for instance, it is rather overreaching to set a learning outcome of the Business Economics II module to be “Familiarity with basic game-theoretic models of industrial organization”. Also, it is unclear how a learning outcome such



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as “be aware of and have practice using specific strategies to deal with challenges posed by diversity at the individual and organization levels” (Intercultural Communication module) is expected to be assessed and for which particular practical purpose.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Thoroughly revise learning outcomes of both the Study Programme and the modules, and make them realistic and applicable to a Level 5 study level.*
2. *Thoroughly revise the competencies of the teaching staff targeted to take part in the Study Programme and make sure their profiles match the expected learning outcomes and future programme developments.*
3. *Double check the employment status of the academics expected to take part in the Study Programme and make sure it matches the standards set.*

2.5. Students

According to the SER, the admission requirements and procedures are regulated by the corresponding regulation on admission which is approved by the Faculty Council. Concrete admission requirements may be found in Article 5 of [23]. The regulation has not been published online given that the Study Programme is yet to be accredited.

As a privately owned institution funded mainly from the tuition fees, the Riinvest pays special attention to balanced group sizing and student satisfaction. As such, and given the feedback collected, the group sizes seem appropriate and matching the academic objectives set.

At the beginning of each study course, students will be informed about the expected learning outcomes and the assessment methods. As commented earlier in Section 2.4, the assessment methods vary depending on the course and/or learning outcome and may include both written and online examining. Regarding the latter, a corresponding student guidebook has been provided to the students on the Riinvest website (<https://www.riinvest.net/en/pranimi/>).



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The SER states that the Riinvest collects results of student completion and makes adjustments to the scrutinised study programmes. However, neither the Riinvest website nor the additionally provided evidence include any proof of such doing. In this regard, as argued earlier in Section 2.2, a particular emphasis on the importance of duly indicators and performance measures to be applied in order to make the programme adjustments adequate should be given.

Student work is validated for plagiarism by means of the dedicated Turnitin software tool, however the most important anti plagiarism (AP) control still relies on deterring clauses set forth by the introduced regulation. It needs to be stressed out that both the Code of Ethics and Conduct [17] and the Riinvest Statute [25] do not stipulate plagiarism-tackling actions, hence, substantial work needs to be done in order to promote and raise awareness of academic integrity in both academic community as well as general public.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Generate a new section of the website dedicated to the forthcoming Level 5 programme regardless of the outcome of the accreditation process. Update and make publicly available all the documentation and regulations addressing the student admission issues such that to clearly outline requirements and criteria pertaining to the given Study Programme.*
2. *Introduce awareness on the importance of academic integrity and plagiarism prevention, and include certain AP activities in the study courses taught.*
3. *Introduce corresponding AP regulation and make it publicly available and discussed.*

2.6. Research

The feedback collected from the interviewed academic staff suggests that no specific stimulation policies other than those relevant to regular academic career advancements have been exercised. Equally so, no regulation covering research activities provides a clear and undisputable definition on what sort of undertaking is considered research. Focus on research has been repeatedly mentioned in [26], however only in a conjunction with other academic

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achievements and goals and not as a separate undertaking. As such it is hard to identify which specific niches, technologies or disciplines the institution would like to excel in especially through the given Study Programme.

From a Level 5 study programme, it is hard to expect some major research contributions would be made, especially given that no previous history in the given research/industry field (Tourism and Hospitality) had been present at the Riinvest. Expectations for teaching staff involvement in research do exist, however these are rather institution-wide expectations and not that related to the given Study Programme. It may hence be concluded that despite substantial research contributions manifested through a number of published scientific and research works, the research priorities and findings are hard to expect to contribute to the teaching process of the Study Programme in a straightforward manner.

It may be deemed that the number and quality of the research publications are adequate as well as the number of the collaboration with external partners. However, it remains unclear how many of these undertakings correspond with the tourism and hospitality industry.

Apart from scientific publications, evidence on other research activities such as consultancy work or technology transfer may only be seen to have been done through the mother-institution Riinvest Institute. This may be deemed as appropriate as it streamlines the profile of both institutions (Riinvest College and Riinvest Institute) the utilises the corresponding capacities in a best possible manner.

Academic and research staff publish their works under the name of the institution, but no particular regulation has been introduced to safeguard intellectual property rights.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Introduce policies which would clearly define which academic undertaking would be considered research.*
- 2. Include students in research activities other than those related to their final thesis/works.*

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2.7. Infrastructure and resources

The Riinvest is a privately funded institution and as such its financial stability relies exclusively on self-generated income. From both the SER and the feedback collected, it is obvious that the majority of the income comes from the tuition fees and hence much of the attention in securing long-term stability of the given Study Programme will rely on the interest of the prospective students. In this regard, and as it has already been discussed earlier, it is not clear how come that the draft financial plan presented in the SER foresees a continuous decline in the number of student enrolling the Study Programme as well as in the thus generated income. This may only imply that either the Study Programme is not a sound business undertaking, or the given financial planning is faulty. Given that the latter would be hard to expect from a business administration-focused institution, it may be deemed that the Study Programme can hardly be seen as promising. In addition, the feedback collected also suggests that, for the given Study Programme, there is no phase-out plan. Given the uncertainties related to the volatile number of students, generating a contingency phase-out plan seems reasonable.

Although the Riinvest locations and premises could not be evaluated physically, there are no reasons to believe the Riinvest is undercapacitated with respect to available infrastructural resources needed to underpin general academic processes such as those shown in [3], [4] and [6]. However, from the video material illustrating the facilities needed for undertaking practical study modules of the Study Programme [5], as well as from the Riinvest web site and the SER, it is not entirely evident the Riinvest has secured quality physical infrastructure and equipment needed to underpin hospitality-specific study courses such as “Kitchen Practice and Theory”, “Service Practice and Theory”, “Ecotourism” and other such courses. Indeed, the facilities shown on the video are more than capacitated for hosting all kinds of hospitality-related activities, nevertheless, these are not training facilities but facilities of a fully operational four-star hotel. Given that it is rather hard to expect any study-related practical work would not impede or hinder regular hotel service, it is highly recommended that the Riinvest considers setting up its own training facilities for undertaking practical part of the Study Programme.



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In the SER, it has been pointed out that proofs of adequate library facilities may be found the video material accompanying the evaluation process. Nevertheless, library facilities are very briefly illustrated only in [6] and – judging by the number of seats shown – may hardly be deemed adequate. Also, no evidence has been observed on what sort of dedicated infrastructure has been made available to students and staff with special needs such as text-to-speech aids, floor guidance for visually impaired people, access ramps, dedicated lavatories and others given that the video material provided [7] shows only access rumps to rather unknown facilities.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Further to the recommendations given in Sections 2.1 revise the financial plan and ensure planned long-term financial stability.*
2. *Set up own dedicated training facilities for undertaking practical part of the Study Programme.*



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3. OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE EXPERT TEAM

The Riinvest College is a relatively new higher education institution but even so has managed to achieve considerable success in different educational fields and disciplines. The evaluated study programme is an entry level programme targeting primarily high school graduates interested to start their professional careers in the hospitality and tourism sector in shortest possible timeframe, but also prospective students of the existing follow-up BSc level Riinvest study programmes.

Due to the Covid-19 crisis, the assessment process did not include any site visits to any of the Riinvest locations, nor it included physical face-to-face interaction with the interviewed stakeholders. Although it may be argued that such circumstances may have influenced the objectivity of the conclusions made, every effort has been made to make the conclusions sound, substantiated by concrete evidence and not a result of speculation or misjudgement.

In this regard, in every section a set of recommendations has been given to address the issues raised through the evaluation process. It needs to be emphasised that all the recommendations made should be seen only as guidelines aimed at improving the overall quality of both the study programme evaluated as well as the institution as a whole. In this regard, it remains to the Riinvest management and staff whether these recommendations would be found affirmative and hence put into practice or disregarded. Nevertheless, in addition to the recommendations made, few general comments on matters to be complimented for, as well on those which leave room for improvements seem appropriate to be made. These are as follows:

1. The institution has demonstrated an unprecedented degree of openness and integrity in communication with the expert team participating in the evaluation. It is beyond any doubt that the entire Riinvest team has made considerable efforts to reach the current level of operation in a relatively short time, which proves the institution has been run and operated by a team of highly enthusiastic people.
2. The institution enjoys a reputation of a respected higher education institution in the Republic of Kosovo whose graduates are capable of taking up responsibilities required by their employers.

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3. Finally, the institution is to be complimented for its demonstrated high standards in the available infrastructure, thus making both curricular and non-curricular activities a joy rather than a burden.

However,

1. Although the Riinvest has introduced a number of regulations and processes aimed at reaching the highest standards of academic and research practice, there are many misalignments and discrepancies between them thus leaving considerable room for arbitrary interpretations.
2. Also, majority of the regulations are still to be fully accepted by the academics and other staff members given that only marginal efforts have been made to promote positive academic undertaking in ways other than through the corresponding rules of conduct.
3. Finally, the Riinvest's ties with both the local and international community are to be complimented for. Nevertheless, going beyond pure number of such ties and partnerships, and focusing more on generating tangible long-terms outputs the academic process may benefit from is highly recommended.

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers that the study program Level 5 in Hotel and Hospitality Management offered by the Riinvest College is *Partially compliant* with the standards included in the *KAA Accreditation manual* and, therefore, recommends *not to accredit* the study program.

Expert

Chair

(Signature)

Dražen Vrhovski

(Date)

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